

# THE POETIC SENSIBILITY OF D H LAWRENCE

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In his book *English Poetry 1900-1950: An Assessment* (reprinted in 1981 by Methuen) whose “object ... is to show where the best English verse of the first half of the century is to be found, to indicate what its qualities are ...,” the poet-critic C S Sisson dismisses Lawrence’s poetry both on grounds of subject-matter and style:

The *mode* of expression constitutes the art. Lawrence was apt to believe that whatever he poured out, so long as he felt strongly about it, was important. But nothing is more trivial, to those not immediately concerned, than the belly-aching of a man of feeling. As a writer of verse, Lawrence was temperamentally well-suited to breaking away from the shackles of post-Victorian poetics but he lacked the reticence, and the ear, for achieving a satisfactory new form. There is little doubt that the subject-matter of much of his verse is, in any case, too little matured to be a fit subject for art (p. 200).

Such an attitude to Lawrence’s poetry is at once predictable and shocking. Predictable because, in view of his recognition as a pre-eminent novelist, Lawrence’s poetry has been traditionally regarded as a mere by-product. But one of the signal achievements of the Lawrence critical-industry in the recent decades has been the gradual awareness both among critics and serious readers that Lawrence “is a great poet in every sense, including the technical.”<sup>1</sup> It is Sisson’s failure to respond to this body of critical opinions (which might be indicative of a failure of critical sympathy on his part) that is shocking.

It is salutary to remind ourselves at the very outset that though Lawrence’s prose did seem to overshadow his poetry from the beginning of his writing career, at least some of his critics and reviewers, on both sides of the Atlantic, felt, especially after the publication of *Look! We Have Come Through* (1917), that Lawrence was a formidable poet, and a few of them even thought that his performance as poet was more impressive than as novelist. The American poet Louis Untermeyer remarked in 1920: “Huge passages in the novel seem like unfinished sketches waiting to be cast in the harder mould of poetic form. The cherry-picking episode in *Sons and Lovers* is perfected and fused in the three quatrains called ‘Cherry Robbers.’ Miriam and Paul among the flowers take on tremendous proportions when they meet in that triumph of raw neuroticism ‘Snapdragons’ (*sic*).”<sup>2</sup> Some literary-historians and critics felt that Lawrence’s poems rather than his novels would survive the test of time. Thus H. J. C. Grierson and J. C. Smith pointed out in their *A Critical History of English Poetry* (1944) that “good judges believe that [Lawrence’s] poems will outlast his novels,”<sup>3</sup> and Geoffrey Grigson wrote, “like Hardy, I rather think that it is by his better poems that Lawrence in the end may keep hold of his readers.”<sup>4</sup> Such predictions may or may not prove to be true but they clearly underline the serious nature of Lawrence’s achievement as a poet. His poetry—

which the contemporary American novelist Joyce Carol Oates has described as “more powerful, more emotionally combative than even the greatest of his novels”<sup>5</sup>—has started to receive the kind of serious and sustained critical attention that it deserves, and I think it will soon be generally recognized that Lawrence’s artistic vision was essentially poetic and that it was most powerfully expressed in his poems. After all, he started as well as ended his artistic career as a poet: his first publication in a literary journal was five poems which Ford Maddox Ford had printed in the *English Review* in 1909 (and incidentally, this resulted in Lawrence’s receiving his first critical notice when Henry Yoxall reviewed these poems in his journal *Schoolmaster* and hailed Lawrence as “a true-born poet.”<sup>6</sup>) and the last of his writings, written on his death-bed, were poems.

Many people, notably Ford Maddox Ford, who knew Lawrence in his early years have commented on the unexpectedly sophisticated aspects of his early upbringing despite the fact that his father was a miner. It is equally well-known then this was due to Lawrence’s mother’s determination that her children would be inspired to lead a more refined life than the one that seemed to have been destined for them by the circumstances of their birth. Ada, Lawrence’s sister, recalled how their mother loved to read books, borrowed from the local library, and to discuss religion and philosophy with her vicar. In her teens, she (the mother) had written poems which appeared in local journals. Lawrence too started to write poems while in college. His sister has recorded how in “a Nottingham University College note-book containing his notes on botany and drawings of specimens he also wrote his first poems.”<sup>7</sup> And the first time Lawrence told Jessie Chambers of his ambition to be a writer he had added that he would like to write poetry though he wondered “what will others say? That I am a fool. A collier’s son a poet!”<sup>8</sup> However, this collier’s son not only got his poems published in the *English Review* (which had a remarkable array of contributors, ranging from Yeats, Bridges, Hardy, Conrad, Shaw, Galsworthy, Wells, Bennett to the great Russians of the time, Tolstoy, Chekov and Gorky) but was also hailed by its editor as “a wonderful poet.” Ford took Lawrence to a poetry-reading session of the Rhymers’ Club where “this completely unknown poet” who looked “shy and countrified”<sup>9</sup> read his poems, including those written in dialect, before an audience which included some of the rising stars of the time like Pound and Yeats.

But Lawrence soon realized, was perhaps made to realize, that if he was to earn his living as a writer which he had determined to do, he must turn to prose. After Ford had ‘discovered’ Lawrence he introduced him to the influential literary figure Edward Garnett whose father’s (Richard’s) edition of *The International Library of Famous Literature* (1899) in twenty volumes had been the main source of Lawrence’s literary education during his early manhood. Edward Garnett, being an adviser to various publishing firms in London, helped in the editing and publishing of Lawrence’s novels, short-stories and plays. But he showed little interest in his verse: in an early letter to Garnett, dated 20 October 1911, Lawrence said, “I know you are not keen on my verse”<sup>§</sup> (*Letters*, I, 317). Even Ford’s successor at the *English*

§ This, and all subsequent quotations from Lawrence’s letters are from *The Letters of D H Lawrence* ed. James T Boulton, vol. I, and *The Letters of D H Lawrence* eds. George Zytaruk and James T. Boulton, vol. II. Both the volumes have been published by Cambridge University Press, 1979 and 1981.

Review Arthur Harrison wanted prose writings rather than poems from Lawrence (see *Letters*, II, 90). Lawrence had to accept the fact that he had "got to earn [his] living by prose" (*Letters*, II, 84), and therefore he devoted himself to writing mainly novels and short-stories. However, as Hardy had done before him, Lawrence continued to write poems too. The similarity between these two poet-novelists is not just accidental. Hardy's first love in literature was poetry. In the words which are technically attributed to Hardy's second wife, his "verses had been written before their author [had] dreamt of novels." She had also noted Hardy's dissatisfaction with those critics who had a tendency to conclude, unjustly, that "an author who has published prose first, and that largely, must necessarily express himself badly in verse."<sup>10</sup> This, with some minor adjustments, could be said about Lawrence's poetic career too. In one respect, however, Lawrence was luckier than Hardy: while the elder poet was able to publish only four poems (and two of them in his prose writings) until 1898, when he abandoned the novel form and devoted himself to writing poetry exclusively, Lawrence was able to publish his volumes of verse steadily alongside his novels. Thus after the appearance of his first two novels, his *Love Poems and Others* was published by Duckworth in February 1913. Until the recent discovery of Lawrence's letters to Walter de la Mare it was not generally known that the latter as Heinemann's 'reader' had facilitated the publication of Lawrence's first volume of verse. De la Mare was not impressed by the manuscript of *Sons and Lovers* which had been originally submitted to Heinemann but he helped Lawrence to arrange his poems and encouraged him to offer them for publication. They were finally published, ironically, not by Heinemann but by Duckworth. De la Mare had already been instrumental in the appearance of Lawrence's series of poems entitled "The Schoolmaster" in *Saturday Westminster Gazette*. For all this help and encouragement Lawrence was deeply grateful to de la Mare. He said: "I know you did what you could for me and for my poems ... Thanks for arranging those verses. I should have botched it horribly (*Letters*, I, 447). Despite the fact that two of his novels had already been published Lawrence was looking forward to his volume of verse with almost boyish enthusiasm: "I should love to have a volume of verses out, in hard, rough covers, on white, rough paper" (*Letters*, I, 442). And again: "There is something peculiarly exciting and delightful about a book of verse, more than about prose" (*Letters*, II, 596).

His special regard for his own first volume of poetry, which he described as "my dearest treasure" (*Letters*, I, 313), can be better appreciated in the light of his high conception of poetic art and confidence in himself as a poet. He complained that in "England people have got that loathsome superior knack of refusing to consider me a poet at all: 'Your prose is so good' say the fools 'that we are obliged to forgive you your poetry.' How I hate them" (*Letters*, II, 146). He himself, on the other hand, believed that poetry in general, and his own in particular, was more significant because it aimed at capturing the living quality of life at its perfection: "It is lovely to have poetry, either one's own or that of one's friends. It seems that there, in the poems, at last, living has come to perfection and to an unchanging absoluteness, that is completely satisfying" (*Letters*, II, 516). This was how he defined poetry but he soon realized that he himself was, in fact, concerned with "instantaneous living" which had "no perfection. no consummation" while the poets in general had been writing about the past or the future. By the time he came to write the Introduction to the American edition of his *New*

*Poems* (1918), he had a clear understanding of his own aims as a poet, and these were remarkably distinctive:

Poetry is, as a rule, either the voice of far future, exquisite and ethereal, or it is the voice of the past, rich, magnificent ... Perfected bygone moments, perfected moments in the glimmering futurity, these are the treasured gem-like lyrics of Shelley and Keats.

But there is another kind of poetry: the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present. In the immediate present there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are all flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon. There is no round, consummate moon on the face of the running water, nor on the face of the unfinished tide. There are no gems of the living plasm. The living plasm vibrates unspeakably, it inhales the future, it exhales the past, it is the quick of both, and yet it is neither.<sup>11</sup>

Lawrence was aware that he was attempting to write poetry which was different from what had been written hitherto in English. However, the "new poetry"<sup>12</sup> that he had thus defined had little in common with the 'modernist' poetry that Pound and Eliot were launching at around the time Lawrence wrote the Introduction. Arguably, the most distinguishing characteristic of 'modernist' poetry was its rather unorthodox and complex technique. Eliot explained that such a technique was necessary if the poet was to respond to his (i. e. modern) civilization:

We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.<sup>13</sup>

Lawrence also felt the need to break away from the traditional forms of versification, and write in free verse, but for different reasons:

We can get rid of the stereotyped movements and the old hackneyed associations of sound or sense. We can break down those artificial conduits and canals through which we do so love to force our utterance. We can break the stiff neck of habit. We can be in ourselves spontaneous and flexible as flame, we can see that utterance rushes out without artificial foam or artificial smoothness. But we cannot positively prescribe any motion, any rhythm. All the laws we invent or discover—it amounts to pretty much the same—will fail to apply to free verse. They will only apply to some form of restricted, limited un-free verse.<sup>14</sup>

But in order to appreciate such ideas about versification, we do not have to put Lawrence in the context of his age as we must do in the case of Pound or Eliot. Of course, Lawrence was a modern poet but he was modern in the same sense as Shakespeare was an Elizabethan, each one having unselfconsciously imbibed the spirit of his own age. Contemporaneity as

such held little attraction for Lawrence. He showed scant regard for contemporary poets or poetry: he dismissed the Yeats of the pre-war years as "vapourish, too thin" (*Letters*, I, 107) and Helen Corke recalled how Lawrence had "read with slashing criticism a book of modern verse."<sup>15</sup>

However, Lawrence has been associated with at least two poetic movements of the early twentieth century because his poems appeared in *Georgian Poetry* volumes and in Imagist anthologies. But it was not only ironical but also indicative of Lawrence's cavalier attitudes towards these poetic movements (whose aims were, in many ways, mutually hostile) that he willingly appeared in the anthologies of both these poetic movements. The simple explanation for this inconsistency is that Lawrence welcomed the money as well as the publicity which these associations brought him. When he received his first cheque for his poem "Snap-Dragon" which appeared in the first volume of *Georgian Poetry* (December 1912) he was deeply grateful to the editor Edward Marsh: "What joy to receive £3 out of the sweet heavens! I call that manna. I suppose you are the manipulating Jehovah. I'll sing you a little 'Te Deum'" (*Letters*, II, 35-6). And again: "That *Georgian Poetry* book is a veritable alladin's lamp. I little thought my 'Snapdragon' (*sic*) would go on blooming and seeding in this prolific fashion. So many thanks for the cheque for four pounds, and long life to G. P." (*Letters*, II, 140). But in reality, Lawrence had little in common with the Georgian ideals of poetry or Marsh's poetic principles. True, Lawrence wrote a favourable review of *Georgian Poetry*<sup>16</sup> but it seems that this was his way of repaying Marsh's kindness rather than his considered opinion of that poetry. Without going into, at this stage, a discussion of Lawrence's mature poetry which would automatically put the simple-mindedness of much Georgian poetry into shade,<sup>17</sup> one may refer to some of his letters of this time which show that both Lawrence and Marsh were rather dissatisfied with each other's ideas about what poetry should be. For instance, when Marsh complained about the poetic pattern (or rather, the lack of it) in Lawrence's poetry, the latter wrote the now-famous letter of 19 November 1913 in which he explained in detail, giving illustrative examples, his own conception of poetic pattern: "... it is the hidden *emotional* pattern that makes poetry, not the obvious form" (*Letters*, II, 104). Lawrence also criticized more regular and in many ways typical Georgians, like Davies and Hodgson (*Letters*, II, 91-93). But in spite of all this, Lawrence seemed constantly to be trying to ingratiate Marsh, allowing him to suggest, and make, alterations as he deemed fit: "... tell me the faults you find and I will try to put them right" (*Letters*, II, 154). He did so not only for the reasons I have already mentioned but also because Marsh, being an extremely influential political and literary figure, helped Lawrence in various ways, including introducing him to prominent personalities—literary as well as social—of his time.

Lawrence's links with Imagism were, if anything, even more tenuous. When he contributed seven poems to Amy Lowell's *Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology* (1915), he did so, according to Richard Aldington, "for financial profit."<sup>18</sup> In his book, *Imagism and the Imagists*, Glenn Hughes remarked that "Lawrence took no real interest in Imagism as a theory of poetry or as a movement" and went on to record the conversation that he had had with Lawrence on this matter:

During a conversation I had with him [Lawrence] in May 1929, he joked a

good deal about it and declared there never had been such a thing as imagism. It was all an illusion of Ezra Pound, he said, and was nonsense.<sup>19</sup>

Nor was Lawrence in much sympathy with Futurism or Vorticism (the latter being "both an outgrowth from and a rebellion against Futurism.")<sup>20</sup> He did admire the Futurists' attempt to reject "old forms and sentimentalities" and their insistence on the spontaneity of art but he felt "the one thing about their art is that it *isn't* art, but ultra-scientific attempts to make diagrams of certain physic or mental states. It is ultra-ultra intellectual, going beyond Maeterlinck and the Symbolists, who are intellectual" (*Letters*, II, 180-81).

This, Lawrence's impatience with the "old forms and sentimentalities" on the one hand, and his refusal to subscribe to the new poetic movements of his time on the other, makes it very difficult for one to classify and categorize him in the history of modern English poetry. Attempts have been made to see him within the Romantic poetic tradition: Edward Lucie-Smith has advanced the opinion that despite Lawrence's "rebellion against many of the things that the nineteenth-century stood for, and despite his concern to be recognized as an innovator, he is closely linked to his Romantic predecessors by an all-embracing moral concern. ... Lawrence ... seems to have been a legatee not merely of Whitman and Shelley, but of Wordsworth."<sup>21</sup> Few will deny the presence of the 'Romantic' elements in his poetry: his deep subjectivity, his emotionalism, his belief in the organic relationship between man and nature and, above all, his restless quest for the truth which lay behind the material and social realities. But surely, the perception of these takes into account only a partial truth about Lawrence's poetry because it fails to do justice to its very distinctive quality. The fact of the matter is that Lawrence was at once a 'traditionalist' and an 'anti-traditionlist.' Without quite attempting to 'revolutionize' English poetry in the manner of the poets of the early decades of this century and being content to write within the existing English poetic tradition, he wrote poems which were strikingly individualistic and distinctly Lawrentian, both in subject-matter and style.

What makes Lawrence's poetry so distinctive (as well as distinguished) is the stamp of his personality, his personal vision of life and his personal voice. When he declared, "I always say, my motto is 'Art for my sake'" (*Letters*, I, 491), he was rejecting the ideals of the 'art for art's sake' movement not only because his working-class upbringing, without much formal education, made that kind of alliance impossible but also because his central concern was with life as he knew it, experienced it and thought about it. He was a deeply subjective writer who channelized (and analyzed) through art his own experiences and emotions. Life, as he lived and experienced it, was the central theme of his poems, and everything else was subordinate to it: art was subordinate to life because he felt that it was life's experiences themselves that created their own artistic forms. He did not hold the classical view that art was a received form the skilful use of which alone gave significance to the artists' vision of life. Rather, it was the quality of the mind of the artist which, because it looked at the world in its unique way, created its own artistic vision and art form. Lawrence had an unusually sensitive personality which would have easily measured up to Wordsworth's definition of a poet. Many of those who knew him have said that they were struck by his unique personality. Aldous Huxley remarked:

'Different and superior in kind.' I think almost every one who knew him well must have felt that Lawrence was this. A being, somehow, of another order, more sensitive, more highly conscious, more capable of feeling than even the most gifted of common men.<sup>22</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that such a man viewed life differently, and reacted to experiences with extraordinary intensity.

Critics have tended to deduce Lawrence's 'philosophy' from his reactions to life as they were dramatized, embodied or implied in his writings. But we must remember that Lawrence himself had warned against subjecting his work to his 'philosophy' or 'doctrine.' In the 'Foreword' to *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, he explained what he regarded as the right relationship between the two:

This pseudo-philosophy of mine—'pollynatics' as one might say—is deduced from the novels and poems, not the reverse. The novels and poems come unwatched out of one's pen. And then the absolute need which one has for some sort of satisfactory mental attitude towards oneself and things in general makes one try to abstract some definite conclusions from one's experiences as a writer and as a man. The novels and poems are pure passionate experience. These 'pollynatics' are inferences made afterwards, from the experience.<sup>23</sup>

However, it would appear that rather than the novels, it is his poems which have proved to be more of a "passionate experience." This is because verse by its very nature was a more suitable medium for such a purpose, and Lawrence knew it to be so:

... it has always seemed to me that a real thought, a single thought, not an argument, can exist easily in verse, or in some poetic form. There is a didactic element about prose thoughts which makes them repellant, slightly bullying. 'He who hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune.' There is a thought well put; but immediately it irritates by its assertiveness. It applies too direct to actual practical life. If it were put into poetry it wouldn't nag at us so practically. We don't want to be nagged at.<sup>24</sup>

It is true that Lawrence was a self-confessed "preacher" (*Letters*, II, 387) who wanted to convey a message to his readers, but he also knew that, as an artist, he could do so only by poetically presenting his experiences in such a way that they revealed his thought or philosophy unobtrusively. What Eliot had said about Donne—"A thought to Donne was an experience: it modified his sensibility"<sup>25</sup>—could be applied to Lawrence with equal justice. In this connection one is reminded, once again, of Thomas Hardy who, after reading "various philosophic systems, and being struck with their contradictions and futilities," came to this conclusion: "*Let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experience.*"<sup>26</sup> (Hardy's italics.) Lawrence had instinctively come to a similar understanding without reading much 'philosophy.' The only philosophical doctrine which his early upbringing might be said to have exposed him to was Christianity, but he soon found it to be untenable. A few letters that he wrote on the subject to Reverend Robert Reid, the vicar who was a close intellectual friend of his mother's show how Lawrence found it difficult to reconcile his human experiences with

the Christian doctrine, much in the manner that led to Ursula's disenchantment with religion in *The Rainbow*. In a letter to the vicar, written when Lawrence was barely twenty-two years of age, he explained his belief that one evolved one's own 'religion' in the light of one's experiences:

I believe that a man is converted when first he hears the low, vast murmur of life, of human life, troubling his hitherto unconscious self. I believe a man is born first unto himself—for the happy developing of himself, while the world is a nursery, and the pretty things are to be snatched for, and pleasant things tasted; some people seem to exist thus right to the end. But most are born again on entering manhood; then they are born to humanity, to a consciousness of all the laughing, and the never-ceasing murmur of pain and sorrow that comes [sic] from the terrible multitudes of brothers. Then, it appears to me, a man gradually formulates his own religion, be it what it may. A man has no religion who has not slowly and painfully gathered one together, adding to it, shaping it; and one's religion is never complete and final, it seems, but must always be undergoing modifications (*Letters*, I, 39-40).

This was about religion. Likewise, Lawrence was led to formulate his own philosophy of life in general as he went through it. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to use the phrase 'vision of life' rather than 'philosophy' because, as Graham Hough has pointed out, Lawrence never cared for philosophical consistency:

At the back of every philosophy is a vision, but the philosopher's claim is that the vision has been corrected—checked for internal consistency with the reports derived from other modes of experience than his own. Lawrence could make no such claim: what he offers is a *Weltanschauung* his own vision of life. But we have no convenient word for this; so we must make do with philosophy, bearing in mind that it is a philosophy only in a loose sense of the word ...<sup>27</sup>

It is useful to remember this because Lawrence has been often, and unjustly, accused of philosophical inconsistencies. In perhaps the most brilliant, as well as damaging, attack on Lawrence's poetry made originally in 1935, R P Blackmur criticized Lawrence not only for fallaciously believing that "if a thing is only intensely enough felt its mere expression in words will give it satisfactory form" (an accusation which was uncritically echoed by Sisson, as mentioned at the start of this paper) but also for lacking "the orderly insight"<sup>28</sup> of the great mystics.

But Lawrence was neither a mystic nor a philosopher. He was a poet: his imagination was essentially poetic which enabled him to explore unknown modes of being. His response to life was intuitive rather than intellectual, and thus he was able to see realities to which ordinary man is blind. Even a mundane act, like taking a walk in the wood, revealed this unique capacity of his, as was noted by Douglas Goldring, an editor and critic who had facilitated the publication of Lawrence's works in the United States:

... to go for a walk with Lawrence through the English countryside was an



unforgettable experience. It is one of the characteristics of a genius to be able to see things which normal people miss. Lawrence made me feel that I had never really "seen" a wood before.<sup>29</sup>

More specifically, Lawrence's perception of the reality of human life and the universe, and of the relationship between the two, was a startling re-discovery of a now-forgotten truth which the primitive man had realized instinctively. Lawrence was convinced that human life was organically related to the universe, and Christian religion as well as the modern sciences have tended to ignore this vital connection. The modern man must try to re-establish this relationship by subduing his egotism and self-consciousness:

We need to find some terms to express such elemental connections as between the ocean and the human soul. We need to put off our personality, even our individuality, and enter the region of the elements ... The primary human psyche is a complex plasm, which quivers, sense-conscious, in contact with the circumambient cosmos ... The religious systems of the pagan world did what Christianity never tried to do: they gave the true correspondence between the material cosmos and the human soul. The ancient cosmic theories were exact, and apparently perfect. In them science and religion were in accord.<sup>30</sup>

This also provides a clue to Lawrence's so-called 'primitivism.' Despite the warnings and protestations of the Victorian prophets, materialism and scientific rationalism had been gathering momentum, and by the time Lawrence came on the scene they had become not only integral to but also characteristic of modern living and thinking. One fatal result of this, according to Lawrence, was the estrangement of human life from nature. On a purely physical level, this had meant that the natural world had been blighted by machines, mines and mills and, in general, by man's acquisitiveness and by his greed for material possessions. Much as Lawrence lamented such dispoiling of nature, he was more deeply concerned about the psychological damage that the alienation of man from nature had caused. Man had lost his 'primitive' instinctual response to life and had become more and more rationalistic and materialistic in his outlook. With his complete trust in reason he sought material satisfaction rather than any inner fulfilment. This, according to Lawrence, accounted for most of the problems of the modern man whose single-minded quest for material possessions had left him humanly unfulfilled. The more he tried with his rationalism and scientific skills to conquer nature the more fragmented he became as a human being: this was because, according to Lawrence, the achievement of man's full identity depended on his being a part of nature like the birds and beasts were. The 'primitive' man instinctively saw himself as organically related to nature. Free from the egotism and self-consciousness of the 'civilized' man who helplessly craved for a self-contained and self-sufficient individuality, the 'primitive' man could never envision himself 'alone' in this world. When he saw himself in his shadow, or in his reflection on water, he found himself surrounded by nature. The modern man, on the other hand, was the victim of an illusion of individualism and of false connections. Only four months before he died, Lawrence spoke about this, his profound, conviction:

... my individualism is really an illusion. I am part of the greater whole, and

I can never escape. But I *can* deny my connections, break them, and become a fragment. Then I am wretched.

What we want is to destroy our false, inorganic connections especially those related to money, and re-establish the living organic connections with the cosmos, the sun and the earth, with mankind and nation and family.

Start with the sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen.<sup>31</sup>

These subjective perceptions and beliefs were not matters of rational discourse but of poetic evocation. Despite his not too seldom didactic and hectoring posture (not unrelated to his deeply religious upbringing) Lawrence did not wish to logically explain his ideas and faith. What he wanted his readers to do was to share his intuitive and intensely emotional apprehension of life. And verse proved to be the ideal medium for him because through the poetic use of words, images and symbols he could embody his feelings and perceptions. Through his verse he tried to recapture the basic *unconscious* state of man and to reveal his true identity and its relationship with the cosmos. Lawrence had evolved his own ideas about the human 'unconscious' which were different from those that had been recently expounded by psychologists and psycho-analysts like Freud and Jung. Whereas they took as their province what Lawrence called "mental" consciousness (suppressed or sublimated), he believed that man's true identity lay in his "pristine" unconscious before "thought" or "intelligence" altered it. An attempt must be made to recover that basic source of life if human life is to achieve fulfilment:

We must discover, if we can, the true unconscious, where our life bubbles up in us, prior to any mentality. The first bubbling life in us, which is innocent of any mental alteration, this is the unconscious. It is pristine, not in any way ideal. It is the spontaneous origin from which it behoves us to live.

What then is the true unconscious? It is not shadow cast from the mind. It is the spontaneous life-motive in every organism. Where does it begin? It begins where life begins.<sup>32</sup>

Since the "true unconscious" is the "spontaneous life-motive in every organism," all forms of life—human, animal and vegetable—originally inhabited the same cosmos or "chaos" as Lawrence termed it in his Preface to Harry Crosby's *Chariot of the Sun*.<sup>33</sup> Animals have continued to live contentedly and gracefully but man's desire for "form, stability, fixity" has led him away from chaos. Though physically man's life is 'ordered' and 'civilized,' humanly it is sterile and stifling. Lawrence believed that it was through poetry that man could get a glimpse of the life-sustaining "living chaos" from which he had banished himself:

[Poetry] is a glimpse of chaos not reduced to order. But the chaos *alive*, not the chaos of matter. A glimpse of the living, untamed chaos. For the grand chaos is all alive and everlasting. From it we draw our breath of life. If we shut ourselves from it we stifle. The animals live with it, as they live in grace.<sup>34</sup>

If man could live instinctively and spontaneously like the animals did he too would be able to respond to "the tremendous unknown forces of life" (*Letters*, II, 218) and feel the miracle of living: "For man, as for flower, beast and bird, the supreme triumph is to be most vividly,

most perfectly alive. Whatever the unborn and the dead may know, they cannot know the beauty, the marvel of being alive in the flesh.”<sup>35</sup> It is not difficult, against this background, to understand how Lawrence came to evolve his ‘religion of the blood.’ “My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says is always true” (*Letters*, I, 503). What the blood “feels and believes and says” is the subject of Lawrence’s poetry.

Mention of Lawrence’s ideas about man-woman relationship becomes inevitable at this point. Inevitable, because he believed that a proper relationship between the two was a pre-requisite for man’s contact with the cosmos as well as human fulfilment. As Lawrence saw it, this relationship is based on polarity, that is to say, both the male and the female, being opposite, start in clash and conflict but they achieve the equilibrium not by the yielding of the individuality on either side but by transcending the conflicts and arriving at a state of creative tension, of complementary balance. For this to happen, both man and woman must respond to the psychic forces within their respective selves and follow their intuition. Lawrence believed that their intuition is best expressed through sex. However, the modern man has become too self-conscious about sex: he has debased it by his “mental consciousness” and materialism, and this has resulted in the thwarting of his instinctive life:

The deep psychic disease of modern man and woman is the diseased, atrophied condition of the intuitive faculties. There is a whole world of life that we might know and enjoy by intuition, and by intuition alone. This is denied us because we deny sex and beauty, the source of the intuitive life and of insouciance which is so lovely in free animals and in plants.<sup>36</sup>

When man is able to regain his intuitive life, he can, through unself-conscious sex with the woman he loves, keep himself “in direct communication with the unknown” (*Letters*, I, 503). Thus, human beings can become one with the “unknown” cosmos by achieving the right man-woman relationship. Such a unity would bring about the kind of fulfilment that is denied to those men and women who remain fragmented and isolated in their ego-entrapped selves:

... let those who are single, man torn from woman, woman from man, men all together, women all together, separate, violent and deathly fragments, each returning and adhering to its own kind, the body of life torn in two, let these finish the day of destruction, and those who have united go into the wilderness to know a new heaven and a new earth (*Letters*, II, 638).

As an artist, Lawrence’s aim was to make this “new heaven and a new earth” within the reach of ordinary men and women. It is true that in his ‘Why the Novels Matters,’ he had claimed that “if you are a novelist, you know that paradise is in the palm of your hand, and on the end of your nose, because both are alive.”<sup>37</sup> But even a casual reader of that particular piece—in which Lawrence goes on to claim that the “Bible—but *all* the Bible—and Homer and Shakespeare: these are the supreme old novels”<sup>38</sup>—would know that there Lawrence was explaining not so much the importance of novelists and novel but of artists and art. One might even say that Lawrence was actually thinking of poets and poetry as the collocation of the Bible, Homer and Shakespeare so abundantly makes clear. It seems to me that Lawrence

himself was more successful in carrying out his intent—to make his readers “know a new heaven and a new earth”—in his poetry rather than in his prose writings. If we approach Lawrence without any preconceptions about poetry in general and his works in particular, he would emerge as a great poet who gave, through the medium of verse, memorable utterance to his profoundly poetic vision of life.

#### NOTES

1. ‘Introduction’ to *D H Lawrence: Selected Poems* ed. Keith Sagar, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971, p. 11.
2. Reprinted in R P Draper ed., *D H Lawrence: The Critical Heritage*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, pp. 133-4.
3. London: Chatto & Windus, p. 506.
4. Geoffrey Grigson, “The Poet in D H Lawrence,” *London Magazine*, (May, 1958), 69.
5. Joyce Carol Oates, “The Hostile Sun: Poetry of D H Lawrence,” reprinted in her *New Heaven and New Earth*, New York: The Vanguard Press Inc., 1974, p. 41.
6. Reprinted in R P Draper ed., *D H Lawrence: The Critical Heritage*, p. 32.
7. Ada Lawrence and G Stuart Gelder, *Young Lorenzo*, New York: Russell & Russell, rpt. 1966, pp. 66-67.
8. Jessie Chambers, *A Personal Record*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, rpt. 1982, p. 57.
9. Edward Nehls, *D H Lawrence: A Composite Biography*, vol. I, Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957, p. 129.
10. Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928*, London: Macmillan, rpt. 1975, p. 299.
11. Reprinted in *The Complete Poems of D H Lawrence* eds. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts, two vols., London: Heinemann, 1964, pp. 181-2.
12. *Ibid.*, 185.
13. T S Eliot, *Selected Essays*, London: Faber & Faber, 1932, rpt. 1976, p. 289.
14. D H Lawrence, “The Poetry of the Present,” reprinted in the *The Complete Poems of D H Lawrence*, p. 184.
15. Helen Corke, *D H Lawrence: The Croydon Years*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965, p. 12.
16. See *D H Lawrence: Selected Literary Criticism* ed. Anthony Beal, London: Heinemann, 1956, pp. 72-75.
17. cf. “Even in his early poetry, he [Lawrence] had a mythopoeic intensity the Georgians lacked. Animistic responses were already stirring, and the ‘dark gods’ were more real to him than deities were to the Georgians.” —David Perkins, *A History of Modern Poetry*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 442.
18. See Frank MacShane, *The Life and Works of Ford Maddox Ford*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965, p. 101.
19. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1931, pp. 169-70.
20. Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt*, London: Faber & Faber, 1967, p. 62.
21. Edward Lucie-Smith, “The Poetry of D H Lawrence —With a Glance at Shelley” in *D H Lawrence* ed. Stephen Spender, New York: Harper and Row, 1973, p. 233.
22. Aldous Huxley, ‘Introduction’ to *The Letters of D H Lawrence* ed., London: Heinemann, 1932, rpt. 1956, p. xxx.
23. D H Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, 1923, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, rpt. 1971, p. 15.
24. D H Lawrence, ‘Foreword’ to *Pansies* in *The Complete Poems of D H Lawrence*, p. 423.

25. T S Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 287.
26. Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928*, p. 310.
27. Graham Hough, *The Dark Sun*, London: Duckworth, 1956, rpt. 1970, p. 218.
28. R P Blackmur, *Language as Gesture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, pp. 289, 299.
29. Quoted in Edward Nehls, *D. H Lawrence: A Composite Biography*, vol. I, p. 492.
30. Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore eds., *Phoenix II*, London: Heinemann, 1968, p. 227.
31. D H Lawrence *Apocalypse*, London: Martin Secker, 1932, p. 224.
32. D H Lawrence , *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, p. 212.
33. Edward D McDonald ed., *Phoenix : The Posthumous Papers of D H Lawrence*, London : Heinemann, 1936, p. 255.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
35. D H Lawrence , *Apocalypse*, p. 222.
36. *Phoenix II*, p. 528.
37. *Phoenix*, p. 533.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 536.

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